

# New Kilpatrick

Sermon

Matthew 17

19th May 2019

***Spirit... move within us a hope that transforms us... bring to life an idea that enlivens us... speak within us a word that inspires us... that we might live more fully in you... So be it... Amen***

There are a few folk here today... more than normal... who I think will use the next ten minutes or so... simply to close their eyes... and drift off... and rightly so... because this has been a busy week for us all... with festival and christian aid... and there have been some incredible moments... fabulous conversations... golden insights... a lot of stresses... a few worries... and a great sense of doing something worthwhile and valuable with others... with a huge number of people met... laughing, talking, learning... with a lot of engagement... locally and globally... So drift off... you are allowed... I might join in!...

Except you who have engaged so creatively this week... and worn yourself out in doing so... either with Christian Aid envelopes... or with singing, talking, making, setting up, welcoming, laughing, learning and serving over four million(!) sandwiches... for the festival... along with so many others who have supported with thoughts and prayers and encouragement... need to be told... what it is we have encouraged... and it begins with a story told by Jonathan Sacks... the former chief rabbi...

He tells of a friend of his... who was on his way home one night... when he was attacked... by a group of people... He was left bruised on the ground...

He struggled to get up... limped his way home... having been physically... and psychologically hurt...

Then something that isn't altogether strange happened... but it was certainly moving... Because of his injuries... he was missing from synagogue the next day... People noticed... and phoned up... Slowly they found out what had happened... and from then on... there was a constant stream of well-wishers... food... visitors... company while he recovered over the next few weeks...

When the police came around few days later... he said to them... "I know this sounds strange... but I almost want to thank my attackers... They showed me the friends I never knew I had"...

Perhaps it is a rather extreme example... but in so many ways it tells us what communities are at their best... where we are there for... and with other people... not because of what we can get out of it... not because there is some exchange of power or economy going on... not because there is some underlying market that keeps us bound up together... but simply because we are bound together by mutual belonging...

But it is more than that... because a community is where we create things you can't buy in the shops... or do things that aren't covered by an act of parliament or an education system... friendship... generosity... love... loyalty... compassion... time... things that arise... only in virtue of being shared...

These things do not exist... unless there is someone else present... According to the first chapter of Genesis... every day concludes with the phrase... "And God saw that it was good"... Only one thing is called 'not good'... Do you know what it is?...

It is not good... for the man (human) to be alone...

And perhaps with our support for Christian Aid... and the engagement with so many folk over this week in festival... we have strengthened the fabric of togetherness... out of which society... communities... parishes are made...

Going back to Jonathan Sacks... he comments that in Judaism... a house of prayer is called a *bet kneset*... which means... the home of a community... and all religions... at their best... are community-building institutions...

And standing in the middle of Kilmardinny House surrounded by tables around which sat so many of our older generations enjoying a tea dance... or in the stable block... with summer seats and a pop-up cafe where so many folk I had never seen were blethering... or at the Rock Choir or the Westertones getting us all to join in some fantastic singing... or listening to speakers about sleep... dementia... fermented foods... all of which spoke into our mental health... of last night's fabulous concert with so much breadth and

variety... perhaps we did that... perhaps we once again... as we have often do... modelled ourselves as a community-building institution... because at almost every event we have enjoyed this last week... there can't have been more than 20-30% of the attendees from our own congregation...

And we talked about mental health... and made space in our own priorities and living and concerns... as well as our wider community... to talk about it... recognising we all have mental health... and in doing so... as a community building institution... offered the things we can't buy in the shops... safe space... friendship... joining together... concern... common ground... support...

Which brings us tumbling into this particularly peculiar story of Jesus telling Peter to go net a fish with a coin in its mouth...

But even that turns us towards each other... and our community... globally and locally... because what might be happening here... and in truth... I can't be certain... is Jesus response to an institution that has forgotten that it was designed to be community building...

Peter has been caught by the temple taxman... "Do you pay your temple tax?" he is asked... Peter stutters but says of course he and Jesus both do...

Now... we have the advantage of knowing Jesus reaction to the temple later in the gospel story... that scattering of the tables... reminding people this house is a house of prayer... a bet knesset... a community building institution... But this one instead milks people of their income in order to keep itself going... as MacCaigs poem illustrates...

Peter however... doesn't... That is still to happen in his timeline...

So when Jesus challenges Peter... about the payment of the temple tax... and Peter confirms that he said they do pay it... Jesus says... "Aye right... if you want to pay the tax... pay it with the coin you find in the mouth of the next fish you catch"... In other words Jesus is responding sarcastially... "I'm not going to support an institution that has forgotten what it is charged to do... You've as much hope of getting the tax from me as finding a fish with a coin in its mouth"...

Now... the story never tells us if Peter actually goes out and catches the fish... which probably means he didn't... It's not a miracle story... It's an ethical story... Remember what it is we are about... remember what it is we are called to be... remember what it is that makes us a kingdom-building community...

We are here to set people free... unbind ourselves... give life... not limit it... control people... bind them up... And as we support Christian Aid... that is what we do... and that is why we do it... unbind... set free... give life...

And in festival... during mental health awareness week... which is why this week was chosen... we invite and hopefully enable that to happen locally... unbind people from whispering about mental health... set people free from the embarrassment or fear or a culture that has us avoid talking about mental wellbeing... and give life to a community that actually wants to support... and care for... and engage with each other... through community building... because we all have mental health... sometimes good... but a quarter of us... at any one time... have mental ill-health... and we know from last week... that we share that with some of the main characters in our faith...

And it has been the church... this congregation... along with All Saints and Bearsden Baptists... who have partnered over 100 different groups... in over 40 events this week... that has enabled us to soften the rough edges of an abrasive... competitive... world... that is too often filled with strangers...

and said "hello"... "let's talk"... "lets share this ground"... "lets meet again"... and recognise... we don't need a fish with a coin in its mouth... We are not an institution that binds up people... Rather we need each other... within and out-with these walls... to unbind and turn us towards each other... to give each other life... in this bet kneset... of a congregation... a neighbourhood... and a world...

